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STYLE: A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON KATE CHOPIN

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
English Composition:  
English Composition

---

by  
Daniel Arredondo

March 2005

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by  
Daniel Arredondo

March 2005

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis takes a look at Kate Chopin's style of writing. The premise is that by taking a look at the author's style, one can understand what makes her writing effective. This understanding can be used in composition classrooms to help students write more effectively.

This thesis takes an intensive look at Chopin's writing one sentence at a time in order to understand how words can be manipulated more effectively. It uses Edward Corbett's theory of style to help define Chopin's style and expose her rhetorical strategies in "The Story of an Hour." There is a discussion of the relationship between the writer, the audience, and the text. This thesis uses Corbett's style theory to justify a close look at the writer herself, and examine the audience she wrote for. Most of the discussion, however, centers on Chopin's writing, and thereby emphasizes the significance of the text.

In light of the fact that the text is so important then, this thesis acknowledges the controversy over using literature to teach composition and provides an analysis of the reasons for and against using literature in composition classes. It provides a historical perspective

of the debate surrounding the use of literature in composition classrooms, and offers practical solutions to help moderate the ongoing debate. Finally, this thesis takes a stand in defense of using literature in writing classrooms in as much as it is necessary to justify studying style as a means of contributing to the teaching of writing.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Kate Flaherty Chopin was born on February 8, 1851 in St. Louis, Missouri during a period of American history associated with civil war and reconstruction, the end of the Victorian period, the close of the frontier period, and the beginning of the industrial revolution. This period of great transition was characterized by a general ambivalence about accepting some fast-changing American cultural values. Most noticeable to Kate Chopin, as she preferred to identify herself, was the reluctance by many Americans to relinquish Victorian perceptions of the role of women in society.

Chopin was bothered by society's refusal to acknowledge the developing new role of women in society, which is evident in the social mores of her time. Even in the twilight of the Victorian period, a woman's freedom of expression was still constrained and women still had not acquired the right to vote. Chopin responded to many social imbalances in her writing. Her literature reveals the social, political, and economic changes that

influenced her time. In one passage out of "The Story of an Hour," her demands are heard through words that are not only synonymous with "strong" but that also actually sound "strong:"

[ . . . ] she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending her in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow creature. A kind intention or cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination (77).

The preponderance of words that begin or contain the letters "p," "b," a hard-sounding "c," "k," and "t," contribute to the "strong" tone of the passage. That is, the words "powerful," "bending," "blind," "persistence," "believe," "impose," "private," "upon," "creature," "kind," "intention," "cruel," "crime," and "illumination" are not linguistically smooth words. In addition, Chopin's use of the word "crime" to refer to a man's or woman's imposition of his or her will upon another is equally strong and direct.

Chopin's stylistic choices like those cited above provide an example of the usefulness of such analysis for a student of writing. A stylistic analysis involves using a specific definition or theory of style to study text. Edward Corbett's style theory involves looking for specific features in a text, because by understanding what features are involved, we can get a good idea about the author's purpose.

Corbett's style theory also goes furthest toward exposing the relationship between rhetoric, communication, and style because it provides room to explore the undeniable connection between the three most important elements of style: the individual, the rhetorical choices the individual makes, and the organic characteristics of a composition. As Carl H. Klaus notes, "Prose exposition is a process of communication involving a writer, an audience, and a piece of writing. The more we know about each participant in the process, the more we know about style" (54).

I begin this thesis with a look at the term "style" and I discuss three different views of style. The first chapter also takes a fundamental look at the controversy over using literature in the composition classroom, and

attempts to reconcile the opposing sides by identifying the common ground that exists between composition instruction that includes literature and that which does not. In the following chapter, I take an in-depth look at the style of Kate Chopin using the methodology proposed by Corbett. Finally, in the third chapter, I discuss other influences on Chopin's writing style and suggest additional ways composition teachers might benefit from incorporating Corbett's style theory into their pedagogy.

#### Common Ground

The process of conducting a stylistic analysis of any text should begin with a clarification of what is meant by the term "style." According to Corbett, style involves expression of the discourse through the conscious selection between available words, patterns of syntax, rhythm, and figures of speech (xii). This definition of style implies the existence of a lexicon, and that some words are better suited than others for a given rhetorical situation.

From the rhetoricians of the classical period and the study of classical rhetoric, which included style among its principal categories, comes one of the few original

and pure theories of style: the "theory of ornate form" or rhetorical dualism. This theory, according to Louis T. Milic, implies that "ideas exist wordlessly and can be dressed in a variety of outfits, depending on the need for the occasion: The grand style, the plain style, middle style, low style and the like" (17). The rhetorical dualistic view of style appreciates the importance that choice and meaning play in writing. And because choice is such a critical aspect of the writer's audience considerations, this theory fits within the rhetorical framework of audience, writer, and text.

Another pure theory of style is the "individualist" or psychological monism theory. Milic reminds us that this theory is often associated with Plato's vir bonus idea that a good man's goodness would express itself in . . . graceful expression (17). According to Milic, this theory "means that a writer cannot help writing the way he does for that is the dynamic expression of his personality, illustrated in his hand writing, his walk and all his activity" (17). This theory also fits squarely within the rhetorical framework of writer, text, and audience.

Arguably the only other pure theory of style is the Crocean "aesthetic monism" theory of style. Milic sees this theory as "an organic view, which denies the possibility of any separation between content and form." The way Milic sees it, "any discussion of style in Croce's view is useless and irrelevant, for the work of art (the composition) is a unified whole, with no seam between meaning and style." Milic adds, "in the organic view, there is no style at all, only meaning or intuition" (17).

The aesthetic monism theory of style forces one to see writing as an abstract activity. When one has communicated something of importance through writing, we know that something abstract was transferred successfully to paper. When a composition affects the reader as the writer intended it to, communication has taken place and the writer has achieved a kind of perfection through writing. This theory puts the text at the forefront of the rhetorical equation involving text, writer, and audience.

A problem shared by each of the three genuine theories of style mentioned above is not found in what they each have to say, but rather what they each cannot acknowledge. That is, that style cannot be defined

exclusively with one of the three pure theories. Style is more complex than that. For a theory to work it must be practical. Although each of the three theories I identified goes a long way to explain critical aspects of writing style, a more practical theory would have to account for all the major aspects of style. Klaus is one who would agree. He believes the three main theories of style "are by no means incompatible," and comments, "they will appear together with different emphasis in almost every commentary on style" (53).

Corbett's style theory merges some of the best aspects of these other theories. It is based largely on the rhetorical dualism theory, but it also appreciates the importance of the psychological monism theory, and the validity of the Crocean, organic view of style. Corbett's theory explains how something was said. And, because of this design, it focuses on specific texts to explain style. It also allows one to consider the writer's background. Corbett's theory supposes there is only one way for a person to express a thought for a particular purpose (338). If the expression of the idea is changed, it is no longer the same idea therefore, it is no longer appropriate for the given occasion, purpose, or audience.

And so, to be practical, a theory must be put to the test. Perhaps there is no better place to test a theory than in a composition classroom.

### Corbett's Theory of Style

Corbett's approach to the analysis of style, is ideal for the composition classroom because it allows us to look at the components of a writer's style and root out the formula for effective writing. It is useful to college composition teachers for other reasons as well. The most important elements of his theory are as follows:

#### Word Choice is the Key Stylistic Ingredient

Corbett's style theory can be used by college composition instructors looking for a style theory to teach that emphasizes word choice. One of the first things readers distinguish, consciously or unconsciously, about style is the writer's choice of words. One word may replace two, three, or more other words resulting in a "terse" style. Some words may have more than one meaning—a fact that writers may want to take advantage of—other words have desirable meanings and connotations that writers may also want to manipulate, and yet other words may have undesirable effects to be avoided. Corbett's



theory can also be used to teach the importance of recognizing stylistic features, which often relies on identifying key words or sentences. Knowledge of words and how to use them for a particular style or for a particular rhetorical situation is a necessary step in learning about style and is a sure sign that the student is learning that the rules of writing are sometimes not unlike other social activities. Just as "we dress for occasions" like weddings, work, and lounging at home, we also write for occasions but instead of clothes, writers change style, notes Klaus (55). Moreover, Corbett's theory can be used by writing instructors to teach that there are different objectives to consider, different audiences to contemplate, and that there are many different writers whose judgment, experience, and education will result in different styles.

#### Pedagogy Should respect Individual Experience

A pedagogy that is based on Corbett's theory also conforms to the expressivist demands of developing writers. Corbett's theory allows the individual writer's personality to manifest itself in his or her writing. His theory is not based on some formula or protocol. There are no set guidelines as to what is or what is not

acceptable style, only the understanding that the possibilities for expression are boundless. There is the understanding that some ways of expression are better than others given the situation. However, ultimately, the decision of what is best and most appropriate rests with the individual. The knowledge of this freedom of expression builds student confidence and self-esteem. Corbett's theory allows writing students to recognize the fact that they have a unique, stylistic fingerprint, and complete control over what others perceive about them through their writing. As students develop verbal facility and become more and more acquainted with basic writing conventions, Corbett's theory will allow them to discover for themselves that "writers write in a certain way because they select the most effective artifices of expression, but also because they are unconsciously bound to the requirements of individual personality" (Milic 20).

#### The Process of Revision is Important

Corbett's theory provides teachers the opportunity to show students how they, through the process of writing and rewriting, can transform on paper what they write to what they actually mean. The lesson that writing is a process is an important lesson to learn as early as possible in a

student's education. It can help a student produce better papers earlier in their educational careers, because, once understood, the idea that it takes several revisions to even come close to an acceptable "product" will prompt students to get an earlier start on an assignment. Getting an earlier start on assignments will allow the student the necessary time to incubate an assignment. That is, develop, and generally improve a writing assignment. A student may even learn to decline the temptation to prepare an assignment the night before it is due. To be certain, when writing is taught to be a process, eventually, students will walk away from their writing classes with another important lesson: the lesson that writing, in a metaphorical sense, is never really complete. Although an assignment must be turned into the instructor on a given date, as a student in life's classroom, there is always an opportunity for one to expand one's knowledge on a subject that matters to the individual, and to contribute to one's community of interest through analysis or criticism of what has been said.

### Imitation is a valuable Teaching and Learning Strategy

Corbett's theory is grounded in classical rhetoric and recommends the practice of imitation; therefore, Corbett's theory offers an advantage to composition teachers when it is necessary to demonstrate to students how good writers write. The time-tested truth that excellence begins with imitation applies especially to writing. Imitation exercises inevitably leave an impression on students. Eventually, the student learns how to manipulate language, but the impression left by imitation exercises provides an important stepping-stone, thereby demonstrating the value and effectiveness of a pedagogy based on Corbett's style theory. Klaus, too, does not believe imitation is necessarily a bad thing. He says, "Imitation, consciously or unconsciously, is the means by which [anyone] begins to develop verbal facility" (61). Milic also recognizes the value of a theory for teaching composition that incorporates rhetorical dualism theory's use of imitation exercises. He believes that for teaching composition, "a dualistic theory seems essential, at least in the early stages" of a student writer's development (20).

Corbett's style theory invites us to learn all we can about style. It allows us to study the writer's background because Corbett believes there is something important to be revealed about the writer's style in doing so. Personal data about the writer will undoubtedly reveal itself in the text and we will be prepared to identify and interpret that information if we are able to recognize it. His style theory requires us to inspect the text closely because that will reveal the rhetorical choices that the writer made. His theory allows us to consider the audience because Corbett understands the rhetorical choices the writer made are inextricably tied to audience considerations. Understanding all this will provide great insight into the writer's purpose. Thus, what Corbett's theory provides us with is a complete view of the style that results from each unique combination of the individual elements of style with the larger components of communication. And such a view seems essential in any college composition class.

#### Style in the Composition Classroom

Corbett's theory seems especially relevant for the heated discussions of using literature in the composition

classroom; as Erika Lindemann writes, "whether or not we include literature in English 101 depends on how we see it" (290). The controversy surrounding the use of literature to teach composition goes back decades (if not centuries). To understand the controversy, Sharon Crowley suggests that we begin by looking at the changing definition of the term "literature." Prior to the eighteenth century, the meaning given to this term centered around what today we would refer to as being "literate." But according to Crowley, by the end of the eighteenth century, "literature" had also acquired an additional meaning. That meaning associated the term "literature" with "having a liberal education," or "polite and humane learning" (79).

By the end of the nineteenth century, the term "literature" had begun to acquire the meaning applied to it today. In other words, the word "literature" began to be associated with a particular kind of text. Hence, no longer was writing associated with the term "literature." The old definition of "literate" as having to do with being "able to read *and* write" had become obsolete.

Gradually, literature eclipsed rhetoric in writing classrooms. This had to do with the idea that literature

demand for rhetoric-based, practical writing skills from business and government seems to have been the academic equivalent of life support for rhetoric-based instruction in colleges and universities.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, literature had garnered discipline status, and supporters like James M. Garnett and Martin Sampson forwarded claims that a literature-based approach to teaching writing improved taste, which resulted in better student writing. Critics complained that knowledge of literature was used as a means to identify and maintain class distinction among the populace. If this was true, then the critics were right to complain about the trend toward substituting literature for composition that was then sweeping the country because the very significant secondary meaning associated with the term "literature" as that of "having a liberal education," or "polite and humane learning" was losing its relevance. The danger involved with such a trend, then, as many have noted, was that of the "academy" once again returning or at least steering towards its elitist origins.

Clearly, the condescension toward composition and its classical rhetorical origins has its roots in the line of thinking that equates literature with improved taste and

sophistication. Unfortunately, many contemporary English faculty have experienced first-hand that teaching literature garners more respect than teaching composition because it is often seen as a more prestigious field of study. Crowley remarks that the presence of literature in freshman composition, "affirms the status of literary studies as the defining activity of English studies," and asserts what most composition teachers already know: "The practice of using literary texts in the required composition course carries enormous weight in the politics of English departments" (87).

In order to begin to understand the controversy over using literature in the composition classroom, it is important to ask a few simple questions. For example, how do the proponents of literature in the composition classroom use literature differently from the proponents of rhetoric, when even proponents of rhetoric such as Corbett use literature to advance their goals? To answer this question, one has to look at how the literature is viewed by each group. The proponents of rhetoric prefer to view literature as a means to an end. That is, they view a literary piece as something to strive for, that "something" being the writing that produced the piece. To



this end, this group has time-tested practices. John Schilb cites Corbett himself referring to their in-depth analysis of the issue, "the concept of disposition, the practice of imitation, and study of the figures of speech" among the exercises receiving the most attention from rhetoric's supporters (20). Generally, the use of literature, according to Crowley involved a "classical approach, using snippets of literary texts to model principles of composition" (97).

Usually, the literary masterpieces or excerpts from literary masterpieces are featured in a chapter in the classroom textbook. The author of the textbook discusses and interprets particular features found in the literary piece that otherwise might go unnoticed to the untrained eyes of students, thus teaching not only through theory, but also by example. The result is that the rhetorical approach to teaching composition allows students to be exposed to many "models of stylistic excellence, worthy of imitation," whereas the literature approach to teaching students how to write limits the students' exposure to but one or a few select texts (89).

In fact, many other teachers who also rely primarily on rhetoric often begin their course with a brief review

of grammar, others supplement their courses with etymology, and yet others use ethics, philosophy, psychology and even logic to demonstrate the orderly, rational world of composition. This demonstrates the flexibility that someone teaching rhetoric has the option of exercising when one is not married to a more stringent, Humanist approach to teaching.

Literature proponents, on the other hand, says Crowley, tend to view literature as "an end in itself" (89). They value literature above the writing that produced it and value literature on "aesthetic and moral grounds," or for its emotional effect, according to Crowley (80). She also points out that literature is "appreciated for its own sake," viewed as a work of art, nothing more and nothing less (81). The free-standing literary piece is examined and interpreted exclusively and in its entirety as its own text by students who are generally required to write about what they "see" in the literary piece. A typical literature-based writing course teacher offers students guidance on interpreting the piece.

Understanding these different views of literature then leads to another question at the heart of the

controversy: Does the study of literature for its own sake contribute to a composition student's education about writing itself? A thorough analysis and discussion of this question is beyond the scope and intent of this chapter. However, it is necessary to address this question, albeit briefly, not only because it is obviously a very important question, but also because it will provide more insight about my first simple question.

The answer to the second question has to do with development of the composition student's taste. Those who favor using literature to teach composition believe that exposing students to exemplary literary works, i.e., to literature that is viewed as art, develops the student's ability to judge good writing versus bad writing and ultimately students will use that ability to choose to write in a way that serves them best. Schilb explains that their direct examination of literary texts to develop writing ability contrasts with rhetoric supporters' use of literature simply as a source of examples of good writing that are imitated in order to acquire the structure necessary for good writing. Whereas the proponents of literature rely on their fundamental belief in the individual's "ability to improve himself" as justification

for using literature to teach composition, those who oppose using literature in the classroom do not place such faith in literature and instead rely on, as Schilb puts it, a more "careful, systematized guidance" provided by rhetoric (20).

So, it is not the fact that literature is used to teach in the composition classroom that makes the two approaches different, but rather the degree to which they rely on literature, the value they place on literature, and ultimately, where the biggest difference in theoretical foundations reveals itself, is in how much faith they each place in the student's ability to improve himself or herself, which in turn is reflected in the pedagogy they each practice. In short, analyzing what they each expect to get out of literature when they use it to teach writing reveals what makes the two approaches so different.

### Three Familiar Approaches to Writing Instruction

According to Lindemann, the product-centered approach to teaching writing typically includes instruction on parts of speech, and sentence structure. Paragraphs, essays, and outlines are produced primarily through

imitation of literature and workbook exercises. Product-centered instructors are guided by the fact that many aspects of writing can be standardized and memorized. Like the Classical rhetoricians, these instructors believe that a strong background in diction, sentence structure, and figures of speech is essential and can be learned effectively through imitation and practice. They also believe that specific rhetorical situations share similar if not the same stylistic features, and use this as justification for a product-centered approach to teaching, which focuses on showing students how to prepare specific writing products for recurring rhetorical situations.

The process-centered approach, on the other hand, does not focus on teaching students the building blocks of writing, but rather on what writers do—plan, draft, and revise. Process-centered adherents like Janet Emig and Peter Elbow believe invention allows students to use language in their own unique way—a process of self-discovery that leads to organized essays. Literature other than student writing, therefore, does not play an important role in a process-centered classroom.

Another view is the system approach to writing, which rejects the image of the solitary writer, and underscores

the fundamental fact that language is a social phenomenon. This approach strives to familiarize students with socially constructed writing systems. For example, Marylyn Cooper explains, the system of purposes describes how writers coordinate the actions they take, and the system of ideas explains how writers connect their own experience with public knowledge. The system approach relies on literature from diverse discourse communities in its attempt to familiarize students with the writing systems of these discourse communities. Students read and analyze science, social science, and humanities texts and write their own journalistic essays, case studies, data analyses, et cetera. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky use this approach to explain how students master the language they encounter in the university.

In order to turn this discussion into a more practical exercise, in the next chapter I will demonstrate how a stylistic analysis can reveal as much about writing itself as it can about the writer's style. I will point out the choices Chopin made as a writer and the effect that those choices have on readers. And in chapter three, I will cite Corbett's theory, which is grounded in classical rhetoric, as a reliable platform for teaching

style to composition students. Corbett believes a reliable method for teaching style is just what composition teachers need, proposing that "What would lay the groundwork for the development of such a method would be a number of descriptions of prose style . . ." (82). My study provides the kind of specific analysis of prose style described by Corbett that may eventually be used to enlighten students in composition classes.

## CHAPTER TWO

### STYLE AND KATE CHOPIN

In his article, "A Method of Analyzing Prose Style with a Demonstration Analysis of Swift's *A Modest Proposal*," Corbett explains the process of a stylistic analysis based on his theory of style. His methods are based largely on the stylistic theory of rhetorical dualism described in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I will duplicate those methods by applying them to Chopin's "The Story of an Hour."

Corbett remarks, "Genre makes its own demands on the kind of style that an author will employ" (87). One of the most obvious constraints for the short story genre writer is the inherent restriction on the overall length of the individual story itself. Considering the significance of this restriction then, this raises the question, "What makes a short story effective?" More specifically, "What makes the "The Story of an Hour" by Chopin so effective?" To answer this question, I suggest that we look at its style. Analyzing its style will reveal various elements of the story and provides the opportunity to glimpse into Chopin's purpose.



Among some of the most salient elements of Chopin's style in "The Story of an Hour " that will be considered in this chapter are sentence and paragraph length, diction, tropes, scheme and other rhetorical devices, and rhetorical types including periodic sentence structure. One of the arguments I will make is that brevity serves as much a deliberate purpose in this story as, for example, diction and punctuation.

### Major Elements of Chopin's Style

#### Sentence/Paragraph Length

When one considers the fact that "Story" is so brief, it becomes evident that sentence length and paragraph length have a substantial impact on the effectiveness of the story. There are just over two pages of text and a mere twenty-three paragraphs in "Story." Five of these paragraphs: paragraphs one, six, seven, twenty-two, and twenty-three consist of just one sentence. The average length of these sentences is only twenty-four words. In fact, the shortest of these paragraph sentences consists of five words. The longest deviates considerably from the mean of twenty-four words, measuring forty-two words in length. In addition, one of the twenty-three paragraphs

of the story, specifically paragraph sixteen, is only three sentences long. In turn, one of these three sentences is only one word long, and one sentence is only one three words long. The average length of a paragraph in the story is merely three sentences long. The entire story is told briefly in only sixty-eight sentences.

The longest paragraph in the story is only five sentences long, three paragraphs are only two sentences long, five paragraphs are only three sentences long, eight paragraphs are only four sentences long, and two paragraphs are only five sentences long. These facts reveal a deliberate conciseness that is a significant feature of Chopin's style in "Story."

By way of comparison, some of Chopin's other short stories are much longer. For example, "At the 'Cadian Ball," is considerably longer. At seven pages of text, it is 3.5 times longer than "Story." Chopin's "The Storm" is also much longer. It is approximately 200% longer measuring four pages of text. Although there is no written rule that dictates how short a short story must be, my research reveals that short stories typically measure between ten and thirty-five pages in length, and seldom go much beyond fifty pages. From these facts, it is safe to

conclude that Chopin consciously chose to make the story brief even by short story standards.

Working in concert with short sentences and short paragraphs in this story is a sparing use of words. There are merely 1008 words in "The Story of an Hour." With a total of sixty-eight sentences, there is an average of only fifteen words per sentence. However, an interesting thing occurred when the story was divided into halves based on the number of sentences. The first half of the story, that is, the first thirty-four sentences, accounted for 606, or 60%, of the words with an average sentence length of eighteen words. On the other hand, the second half of the story, the last thirty-four sentences, accounted for a significantly fewer number of words and significantly fewer words per sentence. On average, the sentences in the second half of the story consisted of only twelve words per sentence. There are only 402 words in the second half of the story. These figures reveal a correlation between suspense building in the beginning of the story and a greater number of words, and fewer words in shorter sentences and climax in the second half of the story.

Brevity is a rhetorical tool that Chopin used to help make the climax of the story more effective. By realizing the climax sooner than later, it is even more surprising to learn that none of the details provided about the train accident are relevant. Had the story been any longer, it would have been more difficult to achieve that amazing twist.

### Diction

An even more interesting aspect of Chopin's style is what can only be described as perfect diction. Diction allows maneuverability and economy in a restrictive two-page space. Chopin demonstrates this maneuverability when it is necessary to change the tone of the story quickly. One way that Chopin changes the tone of the story is by changing Louise Mallard's composure. All this she accomplishes through the use of very accurate and descriptive diction.

For example, upon first learning of her husband's supposed death, Louise suddenly experiences both confusion and melancholy. This is evidenced in paragraph three where Chopin describes her protagonist as weeping with "wild abandonment" (76). The very words conjure up images of a wife in distress approaching the level of

desperation. The words also conjure up the image of a spouse with a genuine, spontaneous feeling of loss who is totally indifferent to self-control or the attention she draws.

Louise's physical condition is just as depressed as her emotional state. The reader knows this thanks again to very accurate and descriptive words. In paragraph four, for example, Chopin describes Mrs. Mallard as sinking, "pressed down by a physical exhaustion that seemed to reach into her soul" (77). Louise's physical exhaustion presumably results from the tremendous burden that the thought of losing her husband has brought upon her. The words "pressed down" and "physical exhaustion" provide the image of an emotionally exhausted, truly broken-hearted wife. That image is not automatic, however. Chopin leads the reader to that image with a very suggestive, careful stroke of her pen. Drawing on the reader's empathy and readiness to help the helpless, she develops the image of a helpless child in paragraph ten when she describes Mrs. Mallard's "bosom [that] rose and fell tumultuously" (77). Her words seem to be accurate if not exact representations of the images in our minds.

Mrs. Mallard's mood and the tone of the story quickly change again as a result of precise diction. Just as quickly as Chopin convinces us of Mrs. Mallard's depressed condition, we see an improvement in the protagonist's emotional state in paragraph eighteen. Mrs. Mallard is suddenly experiencing pure ecstasy; rapture evoked upon the thought of the permanent absence of her husband and evidenced by the words "her drinking the very elixir of life" through an open window (79). There are perhaps no words that could possibly describe better than these what Mrs. Mallard imagined to be a newfound freedom from her marriage.

To demonstrate the difference that a few words make, in this case on the tone of the story, we can substitute some words for others, take note of the change in effect, and truly understand the significance of choice for a writer. Let us begin with the word "afflicted." The word itself means, "having been brought great harm or suffering." Therefore, it is a powerful word that evokes image of a woman weakened by a terrible disease. It is also a word that is used to garner the reader's empathy for the hapless victim of a dreaded heart condition. And when one considers that some synonyms for afflicted are

cursed, plagued, stricken, and tormented, it is easy to understand why our empathy is so successfully manipulated by Chopin.

However, as anyone who has ever used a thesaurus knows, synonyms cannot always be used successfully in part because each word has a different connotation. Such is the case if we were to replace "afflicted" with "stricken." We would imagine a woman in immediate danger of dying and that image would not be suitable for the story for two reasons. The sentence would no longer be as effective as the original because it would go too far to describe a woman with a heart condition and would therefore potentially mislead the reader into thinking that Mrs. Mallard is already close to death, which is not the case. Also, if the reader were misled in such a way at the beginning of the story, then he or she and the entire story, for that matter, would be thrown off of its carefully developed path and the ending would be not nearly as surprising.

The same would occur if the word in question were to be substituted with the word "cursed." Knowing what we do know about connotation, and how important connotation is for a writer whose goal it is to manipulate a reader's

unconscious knowledge of connotation for the purpose of creating a very specific image in the reader's mind, such a word could also derail the story's surprise ending because the reader's interpretation of the word might include the idea that such a curse can be nothing less than complete and final. In other words, a "curse" would signal eventual death for its victim. Chopin certainly would have wanted to avoid words with the potential to destroy the ending of her story.

The words "kills" and "killed" describe a very sudden death. The word "kills" is used to leave no doubt in the reader's mind that Mrs. Mallard dies. This is important because it must be clear that it is Mrs. Mallard that dies in order for the ironic twist to work. The unambiguousness of "killed" shocks the reader appropriately enough for story dependent upon how well the author describes a wife's reaction to the sudden, tragic loss of her husband. The author avoided using a word that otherwise might be a reasonable alternative. Had the author used the word "casualties" instead, for example, a lackluster tone would have been the result.

The solemn tone of the story, especially noticeable in the opening lines, mimics the somber theme of death



that underlies the entire story. This characteristic stems from strategically placed words at the beginning of the story, including "afflicted," "veiled hints," "railroad disaster," "killed," "tender," "sad message," and "paralyzed inability." These words immediately proclaim the harbinger of death's arrival upon the scene in the story.

In the fifth paragraph, Chopin's style begins to acquire a noticeably more lively tone when she uses progressively more vivid diction. For example, the portion of the sentence that reads, "[ . . . ] the tops of trees all aquiver with new spring life" conjures breathtaking images of an inspiring and glorious spring day that has the ability to relax the mind and rejuvenate the soul (77). In addition, the metaphorical words "delicious breath of rain" (77), and the remarkable degree of iconicity in the word "twittering" in the part of the sentence that reads, "[ . . . ] countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves," dramatically alters the tone of the story (77). This vivid diction allows the reader to virtually see and hear the little sparrows entertaining Louise Mallard, and delighting her senses as she hears "the notes of a distant song which some one was singing

[reaching] her faintly" (77). Consequently, the reader is not only able to identify and empathize with Louise's state of being, but is also virtually able to absorb some of the euphoric experience itself.

The tone created by this vivid diction provides contrast for the dreary tone of the previous paragraphs of the story, and helps Chopin begin to set the stage for the climax of the story, which requires that the reader accept Louise's ecstatic condition from that point forward.

The diction of certain words including some of those already mentioned above and others like "intelligence," "wept," "bespoke," "bosom," "imploring," "importunities," "unwittingly," and "descended" beginning in the second paragraph add a considerable degree of formality to the tone of the story. This is especially true when one considers that the situation presented in the story was by all indications informal, and that Chopin could have easily used their more common counterparts instead. In addition, these words also suggest that Louise Mallard belonged to at least the middle class of society. Names such as "Brently," and "Richards," suggest that the characters may even belong to society's upper class.

Another aspect of diction in this story relates to Chopin's use of proper nouns. In paragraph one, for example, she refers to the main character by name as opposed to using a nickname as is common in literature. Chopin establishes a formal tone by using a formal title and the character's married name. In addition, by using the protagonist's title and married name in the first paragraph, she immediately and simultaneously reveals the fact that the protagonist is married, which is information that is absolutely necessary in order for the reader to really be able to appreciate the profound social issues brought to light in the story.

More examples of proper nouns are found in the second paragraph. "Josephine," "Richards," and "Brently Mallard" are interesting because Chopin could have used less formal abbreviations or variations of those names such as "Josie," "Brent," or in the case of "Richards," she could have simply used his given name instead had she wanted to establish an informal tone in the story. If "Richards" is his given name, referring to someone, in this case "Richards," by their family name as Chopin does in the story usually indicates some degree of formality in a relationship. Similarly, in paragraph sixteen Chopin

could have created a less formal sounding nickname for "Louise," but by not doing so, she demonstrated the desire to maintain a formal tone consistently throughout the story.

Another characteristic that contributes to the formal tone of the story is the conspicuous lack of word contractions. Considering the lengths to which Chopin went to endow the story with a formal tone, it seems quite safe to conclude that this too was part of the story's design.

#### Periodic Sentence Structure

Periodic sentence structure is an important aspect of Chopin's rhetorical strategy for writing this story in that it is used to capture and hold the reader's attention. It can even be said that this characteristic is key to the story's success because without it the story would not generate the interest that it immediately does. The first sentence in the story provides a classic example of periodic sentence structure. It reads, "Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death" (76). The words "the news of her husband's death," with particular attention on the

word "death," are withheld until the end of the sentence in order to keep the reader anticipating every subsequent word in the sentence, and Chopin seems to do so quite effortlessly.

Periodic sentence structure also affects the tone of "Story." The tone of the story is appropriately grave given the situation presented is that of a death. Chopin would probably not have achieved the tone for "Story" that she does so quickly in the first sentence if it were not for her careful attention to sentence structure. For example, if the first sentence read, "The news of her husband's death was broken to Mrs. Mallard as gently as possible because it was known that she was afflicted with a heart trouble," or perhaps, "Great care was taken to break as gently as possible to Mrs. Mallard the news of her husband's death, knowing that she was afflicted with a heart trouble," she would not have established the proper tone, and the story would have immediately collapsed.

Another example of periodic sentence structure is found in the sentence, "It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard's name leading the list of 'killed'" (76). This is a skillfully designed

sentence that also postpones the key word in the sentence for last. This technique is used by Chopin to make the story suspenseful and intriguing whereas using regular sentence structure would have rendered the sentence ordinary and dull and otherwise lacking the structure necessary to demand the reader's attention like the original sentence does.

Chopin also concludes the story with a sentence using periodic sentence structure and thus adds even greater emphasis to the story's climactic ending. The sentence reads, "When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease—of joy that kills" (79). Unlike the other examples of periodic sentence structure noted, this example's primary function is to effectively repeat and make it perfectly clear the fact that Mrs. Mallard has indeed died. It is now apparent how important periodic sentence structure is as an element in the style of this story, because periodic sentence structure contributes to the effectiveness of the ironic ending upon which the story's success hinges.

### Rhetorical Devices

Chopin creates a sense of abruptness with the intentional violation of at least one rule of writing.

For example, she violates the rule requiring the use of indentation at the beginning of a paragraph. Chopin begins the first paragraph of the story without the use of indentation. By doing so, she effectively mimics and alludes to the inopportune timing often associated with death. She does so in order to contribute to the feeling of suddenness that comes with the news of a tragic death.

By consciously disregarding this rule, she expressed herself in a unique way, and created a story that grabs readers in the same way that a headline is intended to draw the passerby into the newsstand. In this example of rhetorical genius, she demonstrates a rhetorical strategy similar to the rhetorical device known as metaplasmus, which involves the addition, deletion, or transposition of a letter or a syllable in a word.

Chopin relies on other rhetorical tools to please her audience. In paragraph fourteen, Chopin successfully appeals to the reader's empathy for a young, grief-stricken woman who believes her "will bending" husband to be dead. In order to accomplish this with so little text, she must rely on a rhetorical device known as praecisio. Praecisio is an important ingredient in her formula for writing a short story where economy with words is so

important. It involves using the idea that society conforms to the problem of a male-dominated society as a theme for her story. In other words, she uses that theme as a rhetorical tool to elicit the reader's thoughts and emotions on the subject. Relying on the fact that the reader has a vast reserve of thoughts and emotions on this subject and that all she has to do is merely hint at the problem, she is able to say a lot without using many words at all. Thus, *praecisio* serves a purpose in this story much like the way a good piece of art eliminates the need for words or explanation.

Another rhetorical device that contributes to Chopin's elevated style of writing is epizeuxis, which involves the immediate repetition of words. In paragraph eleven, she writes, "Free, free, free!" to express Louise Mallard's passionate response to being liberated from her marriage (78). She uses epizeuxis again in paragraph sixteen when she writes, "Free! Body and soul free!" and thereby reveals the profound depth of the repression Louise Mallard associates with her marriage (78). It is also interesting that Chopin uses epizeuxis to reiterate her strong feelings against society's acceptance of the



repression of women. It is a theme that will resurface again as we shall see shortly.

Chopin also applies a form of inclusio in the last paragraph when she repeats information already mentioned in the first paragraph. That is, the information pertaining to the heart condition ailing Louise Mallard. This second reference to her heart trouble emphasizes the fact that Louise's heart trouble stems not from a physical defect, but rather from a defect in her marriage—a defect that results from her lack of love for Brently.

Chopin uses repetitio essentially the same way. The story begins with a brief mention of Mrs. Mallard's heart condition, and also ends with an equally brief mention of this disease. The strategic placement of the sentences that mention Louise's heart trouble in the first and the last paragraphs of the story makes it clear that Chopin deliberately repeated the subject of heart disease in order to imply that Louise's loveless marriage, a marriage made worse by the fact that her husband was controlling, essentially rendered Louise a woman with "heart trouble." Thus, we see Chopin's allusion to loveless marriage and dis-ease of the heart.

## Schemes

Among the rhetorical schemes Chopin incorporates in "Story" are parallelism and climax. Parallelism, according to Corbett, is the "similarity of structure in a pair or series of related words, phrases, or clauses," and climax is "the arrangement of words, phrases, or clauses in an order of increasing importance" (Classical Rhetoric, 381-393). However, the parallelism and climax of interest in "Story" occur on a larger scale than within merely individual sentences. In a fine example of artistic deviation from the ordinary, Chopin develops parallelism between periodic sentence structure and climax. Periodic sentence structure occurs several times within the story and she uses the entire story to develop climax. What makes these two elements of Story especially interesting is the way in which Chopin weaves them together. She does so by using periodic sentence structure to suspend the most important word or key part of a sentence for last and thereby keep the reader's attention throughout the story while simultaneously, and systematically suspending the best part of the story for last via the scheme of climax.

Another variation of parallelism found in "Story" is the parallel she creates between the theme of the

unexpected, abrupt and often stealthy nature of death as she portrays it in this story and conciseness in the story's sentences and paragraphs. Chopin designed this conciseness to parallel or mimic the fleeting nature of life and the sometimes seemingly unfair, premature, and non-discriminating nature of death in the story—both the assumed death of Mr. Mallard and the unexpected death of Mrs. Mallard.

Yet another kind of parallelism is evident in the fact that Chopin begins the story with a one-sentence paragraph and ends the story with a one-sentence paragraph. The reason she does this has something to do with the presentation of the story to readers. Chopin deliberately designed the structure of the story using short paragraphs to frame the story for presentation essentially making it appear tidy, balanced, and, thus, easier and more enjoyable to read.

Another scheme Chopin uses is climax. The climax of the story begins in paragraph twenty-one with Brently Mallard's entry through the front door of the house oblivious to all of the drama that transpired during his travel-related absence. The climax ends in the last paragraph of the story with the death of Louise, and

satisfies the reader's need for closure whether or not one is happy with Louise's death. It is the abstract reward that the reader gets for the temporary excursion into Chopin's fictional world.

### Tropes

Another feature that exhibits the sophistication in Chopin's style is her use of tropes. She reveals a penchant for metaphorical language that conjures powerful and profound images appropriate for the theme of the story. An example of such language is found in the words "storm of grief" describing the intense mourning of a recent widow (77). The word "storm" suggests intense weather conditions and inordinate amounts of precipitation, not unlike the intense and overwhelming grief we feel pelting us when we are emotionally burdened by the passing of a loved one. Also, a "storm of grief" is an accurate metaphorical description of the feeling that accompanies the loss of someone we love, which is often so difficult to accept, we enter a surreal world of denial and grief. Thus, a "storm of grief" is an apt way to describe the feelings associated with the actual or presumed loss of a beloved family member, and the reader can identify with this description of those feelings.

Chopin uses a powerful, uplifting combination of metaphors to describe the refreshing quality of rain and the cleansing that it represents for Louise Mallard. The words in the sentence, "The delicious breath of rain was in the air" indicate the passing "storm of grief" is now a rejuvenating rain which effectively coincides with the euphoric feeling accompanying Louise Mallard's virtual windfall of freedom resulting from her husband's presumed death (77). The words provide the reader with the understanding that Mrs. Mallard feels thoroughly cleansed of her past marriage by the death of her husband.

In paragraph twelve, she uses another interesting combination of metaphors. She writes, "[ . . . ] a monstrous joy [ . . . ] held her" (78). Obviously, the word "monstrous" implies something extraordinarily large and "joy" means something out of which she derives pleasure. "Monstrous joy," then, is describing the immense, overwhelming pleasure that Louise is deriving from her thoughts. The words "held her" imply a gentle, protective, innocent embrace. Therefore, the reader understands that Louise is in a state of utter utopia—a state in which she finds herself cradled by the thought of being "body and soul free."

What makes the combination of metaphors "monstrous joy" especially interesting is the fact that it is simultaneously an oxymoron. Of course the word "monstrous" is derived from "monster," which is some kind of hideous thing or beast that is indescribably big and/or ugly. When juxtaposed with the word "joy," however, the meaning becomes simply something indescribably joyful.

Chopin uses metaphoric language to describe Louise Mallard's apparently overwhelmingly uplifting feelings associated with what she believes is her new-found freedom from marriage. Chopin writes, "She was drinking the very elixir of life through that open window" (79). Louise is experiencing those amazing feelings as a result of both her imagination and her physical senses, which have suddenly, (we are to understand are the result of her husband's presumed death,) become highly acute and have allowed her to see the world from a whole new perspective. The words "elixir of life" serve in part as Chopin's response to Josephine's (Louise's sister) comment that Louise would "make [herself] ill" sulking in a room where she has locked herself. The words also serve to suggest an unhappy marriage in need of a miracle cure she was heretofore was not even aware that she needed. Louise's

imagination serves as her elixir, or miracle cure, providing her with an epiphany of thoughts associated with being liberated from an unhappy marriage.

A different kind of metaphor, symbolism, is evident in paragraph nineteen. In that paragraph, Chopin describes Louise Mallard's imagination of what her widowed existence would be like using symbolism. She writes, "Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own" (79). In nature, spring, of course, represents a new beginning in the cycle of life, and summer is the season trees come to fruition. In literature, spring can symbolize hope, new life, and a new beginning; summer can symbolize a period when living creatures are in their prime, evidence of nature's fertility abounds in both the plant and animal kingdoms, and, in people, worries are still far beyond the horizon. Thus, when Chopin refers to spring, she might be alluding to the symbolic meaning attached to spring and the end of a cold, lifeless period in Louise's life represented by her marriage. For Louise, then, the end of her marriage means the start of hope and new possibilities at a time when she is in the prime of her life.

In paragraph seven, Chopin attributes child-like demeanor to Louise and portrays her feeling dejected and confused. Chopin describes Louise sitting "motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep" (77). Chopin's reference to "a child" is made subtle on account of the word "as," which she used instead of the more common "like." Nevertheless, the subtle reference to "a child" and the child-like behavior or state-of-being she attributes to Louise is used to lend the quality of innocence to Louise and associate the notion that Brently Mallard's death symbolizes a rebirth for Louise. This notion is consistent with the symbolism associated with the season of spring mentioned earlier.

Another side of Chopin's style involves her use of irony. From the very beginning of the story one is led to believe that Mr. Mallard met a very sudden and tragic death. However, at the end of the story, the words, ". . . she had died of heart disease—of joy that kills" reveal the unexpected death of Mrs. Mallard and thereby provide the ironic surprise.

The irony works very well because it is only after Louise reveals her deepest thoughts and actual feelings



for her husband that we learn Louise suddenly in fact dies and, consequently, none of the fantastic visions she had about life without her husband would be realized. What also adds to the effectiveness of the ironic ending is the irony in the juxtaposition of the words themselves. That is, the words "joy" and "kills" allow the reader to interpret Louise's death as either one of pure excitement to see her husband alive or a death brought upon by pure terror at the thought of resuming her ordinary, mundane life with Brently. Certainly, the words can be seen as a play on the word "killjoy" in which case the reader is left with the idea that to have seen her husband alive again has killed Louise's recently renewed joy of life.

The ironic ending is made possible by the inaccurate news of Brently's death initially relayed by Richard's. The inaccurate news triggers Louise's imagination of what her life might be like without her husband without ever questioning the accuracy of the information she receives. Along with the ironic surprise comes the lesson of a time-tested truth, which reminds us not to jump to conclusions and not to be fooled by appearances.

Chopin incorporated many features into "Story" that appeal to readers. The short sentences and paragraphs,

superb choice of words, and even the imagery and symbolism Chopin employs reveal the several layers of rhetorical manipulations at work simultaneously. Yet, it may be impossible to identify the word, punctuation, or rhetorical device that accounts for its effectiveness as a short story, or more specifically, that describes its style. If anything, this fact helps us appreciate the Crocean concept of seamlessness all the better. That is, putting aside for a moment the Crocean denial that there are so many identifiable rhetorical features in "Story," we can see that so much of "Story" in fact does depend on what Milic describes as "meaning or intuition" (17). However, without a more thorough look at the author and the facts about her life that could reveal a purpose, an accurate description of her style would continue to elude us. In the next chapter, therefore, I complete my description of Chopin's Style in "Story" by reviewing some biographical information, events and people that influenced her style, as well as other aspects of her style.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### A REVEALING LOOK

On June 9, 1870, Kate Flaherty married Oscar Chopin in St. Louis. By October of 1871, she had settled in New Orleans. Over the years that followed her husband's death in 1882, with the responsibility of raising six children nearly fulfilled, she would have time to pursue writing as a vocation. Chopin spent the next fourteen years of her life actively writing about life as she saw it in Louisiana, which had become "her window into the world" (Ewell 19). However, not all of her writing was met with enthusiasm.

Disappointment followed the public's cold reception for her last novel, The Awakening, including the rejection and return of A Vocation and a Voice by the would-be publisher Way and Williams. Chopin died on August 22, 1904. For nearly six decades the genius of her style in the third volume of her work was eclipsed by the tremendous uproar and reproach directed at her after her last novel. Once it was published in 1963, critics would agree that A Vocation and a Voice represents the

culmination of Chopin's talents as a writer of the short story," (Ewell 126). "The Story of an Hour" is a piece from that collection that exemplifies her craft as well as any one of her other stories. And there were several notable influences on her craft.

Guy de Maupassant, Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, and other writers influenced Chopin's style. Maupassant, for example, was known for putting surprise endings in his stories. Known for his "impeccable, concise prose, carefully chosen, expressive details," Maupassant revealed a "direct and simple" style to Chopin, and in so doing provided her with an effective way to impress her readers, and a new perspective on writing (Ewell, 19). Similarly, Jewett and Freeman wrote true-to-life fiction. It is these same elements in Chopin's style that contributed to her appeal. Chopin, after all, wrote for "seasoned souls" . . . "about adult realities" (Toth xiii).

Maupassant's advice to Chopin on "how to use telling detail and how to give the story with the utmost economy" manifested itself in "Story" (Seyersted 121). It is not surprising that Barbara Ewell describes Chopin's style as "Spare and direct, with a preponderance of simple

declarative statements" (22). A simple and direct technique Chopin also learned from Jewett, whose work was simple in form (Seyersted 121). Seyersted also comments that Chopin's frank, realistic portrayal of women, and "artistic control of direct statements and subtle symbols" could have been learned from Freeman (121).

Although Chopin appreciated a "direct" style, and although she was troubled by the second-class status afforded to women of her time, she also realized that the task of bringing positive social changes for women, through her writing, was an enormous challenge, and she proceeded cautiously. She alludes to male dominance and the unjust conditions that existed for women of her time with a careful selection of words like "There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence" in paragraph fourteen of "Story." Her words are powerful, yet the language in her message is indirect. Indirect language was part of her strategy to get people to take a critical look at the oppressive social conditions for women. While it kept her within the confines of "literature," it also gave her some immunity from controversy.

Chopin also implied that women were victims of their own acceptance of their condition as much as they were victims of "will bending" husbands. In one passage, she describes Louise as she begins to recognize what she thought was her newfound freedom as a widow and single woman. That passage reads in part, "She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will . . .," and provides its reader a glimpse into the mind of a woman victimized by a controlling man, and invites readers to explore and reflect upon one's own conformity with this persistent problem (77).

Evidence of Chopin's appeal to young, literate, impressionable, and proactive single women who Chopin hoped could see themselves in Louise's condition is found in her description of Louise. She is described in the story as "young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke of repression and even a certain strength" (77). Her hope that readers would be able to see the relevance of Louise's life in their own is also what she believed would spur the country toward positive changes for women.

Chopin supplied another suggestion that women were not giving enough thought to their status when she

described Louise Mallard's facial expression soon after her sister Josephine reveals that Brently is dead and she sequesters herself in her room. She writes, "But now there was a dull stare in her eyes . . . . It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought" (77).

Chopin's high ideals are evident in other ways as well. She uses the story as an outlet for her views against marriage as an institution. That is, marriage without love. She writes, "And yet she had loved him-sometimes. Often she had not" (77). She is able to disguise her allusion by using the verb "have" in the past-perfect tense while taking advantage of the fact that Brently is (presumed) dead. The word "sometimes" suggests to the reader that Louise did not love her husband. The second sentence removes all doubt.

When we examine Chopin's choice of names for her characters, we hear her message against the disparate treatment of women. As previously noted, the names "Brently" and "Richards" suggest that these two characters belong to society's upper class. The names are not ordinary given names, and as a result, demand honor and respect-the same reason why military and educational

systems use the title "Mr." or "Mrs." and insist on using a person's surname. The female characters, Josephine and Louise, on the other hand, have ordinary-sounding names. The analogy she wants us to see is that men hold a privileged position in a marriage and because this is so, men are essentially stifling their wives the way Brently Mallard stifles Louise. This amounts to disrespect for women as individuals. It is this repressive, disgraceful treatment of women that Chopin hoped would change.

Chopin was beloved to her contemporaries. Emily Toth comments in A Vocation and a Voice, "Editors and readers applauded her stories of Louisiana country people" (xiii). A critic from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and other local reviewers unanimously approved her demonstrated "artistic skill" (Seyersted, 53). The editor of the weekly publication The St. Louis Mirror, William Marion Reedy, held a high opinion of Chopin. Aside from publishing some of her stories that no other publisher would accept, he expressed his professional admiration for Chopin describing her as possessing "pure literary genius" (Seyersted, 64). He also commented that "she belonged in an American academy of letters," and called her "one of St. Louis' "Minervas," women most esteemed for



intellectual achievements" (Toth, xviii). Of Bayou Folk, Reedy commented that it is "The best literary work that has come out of the south land in a very long time. It is best because it is truest" (Seyersted, 57).

The "truth" that Reedy saw in Chopin's stories had a lot to do with the form as well as the content. It also had more to do with the "truth" that she sought to change and less to do with "sentimentality" for mere entertainment, thereby making her stories practical and relevant. In short, there are many elements of her style that give her stories the ring of truth. To begin with, she was skilled at choosing the best possible word to describe a thought, a scene, a situation, or a state of being. She mastered the ability to say so much with so few words. She could manipulate a sentence to demand a particular response from a reader. Her command of rhetorical devices and schemes provided her with another way to control the development and outcome of a story. Her ability to conjure vivid and profound images in readers' minds with unique metaphors demonstrates her understanding and mastery of the power of language. Perhaps the most memorable and most enjoyable characteristics of Chopin's style are her use of irony and

climax. There may be no other example for a freshman student of writing that can demonstrate the combined force of these two powerful elements as well as "Story."

Chopin's style possesses many qualities that can be pointed out and otherwise used to demonstrate stylistic effectiveness to students in beginning writing classes, and Corbett's style theory makes this possible. To begin with, its emphasis is on word Choice. It would be difficult to find someone who would dispute the fact that a strong vocabulary has a key role in the process of choosing a word or the importance of having a strong vocabulary. A strong vocabulary is essential in any field of study, and provides individuals with the foundation necessary to make decisions about word choices they will need to make, especially in their professional careers. For this reason it is important for composition teachers to emphasize vocabulary in particular, and to teach the difference that word choice makes in writing. Andrea Lunsford teaches her students the importance of word choice when she professes that all language has an argument. Her claim that even friends wish to convince each other of their sincerity when they exchange greetings, and even "objective news reporting" displays

argument when "using emotional language and focusing on certain details," demonstrates the importance and pervasiveness of word choice in matters of style (236).

It's hard to imagine the consequences of not having a strong vocabulary, and equally difficult to rationalize not providing at least some training on the meanings and connotations of words to students in writing classes. The fact is that people are evaluated and judged based on the words they use to express themselves, and that we live in a competitive society. As the demand on individuals in all segments of society and the economy to outperform their predecessors and competitors continues, individuals with strong vocabularies will have a major advantage over those who do not. Therefore, regardless of the theory one supports in his or her classroom, it is wise to prepare students for lives and professions in which word choice can be so crucial. In addition, a strong vocabulary, and awareness of the importance of word choice are predecessors to excellence in any discipline or profession, and contribute to critical thinking skills necessary for success in all aspects of life.

Corbett's theory not only provides the foundation to validate claims about the importance of having a strong

vocabulary, but it also justifies writing teachers taking the time and effort to emphasize vocabulary building exercises, thereby making it easier for teachers to actually incorporate vocabulary exercises into their syllabi.

The methods teachers use to incorporate vocabulary building exercises is limited only by their creativity. They can use matching exercises, fill-in-the-blank exercises, demonstration-by-example exercises where students demonstrate understanding or knowledge of a word's meaning by using the word in question in a sentence, exercises requiring students to simply provide the definition(s) for the given word(s), or any combination of these and other methods available.

A broad repertoire of words can only come through a few reliable, proven methods of study. One such method involves diligent though tedious study of words and their meanings, which incidentally also helps develop good study habits in young people who need them and reinforces them in those who already possess them. But composition teachers can lessen the tediousness by assigning a variety of exercises like those already mentioned.

Another proven method of study involves acquiring words and command of the language through reading. Reading provides an endless supply of examples of good writing for students in all disciplines, from various backgrounds, and with different interests. Reading is more enjoyable to most students than trying to memorize a list of words and their meanings, in part because it lacks the repetitiveness associated with attempts to memorize something. Reading is also a more convenient way for students to build their vocabularies while they attempt to stay ahead of the many challenges, obstacles, and responsibilities in their ever more busy, demanding lives because they can complete their reading assignments while using public transportation to or from work, while waiting for their children to complete soccer practice, and even on their lunch breaks away from work. Corbett's theory does not have an aversion to literature and reading because of the wealth of stylistic examples that it provides. In short, Corbett's theory allows composition teachers a broad range of choices and flexibility on how to teach. Teachers influence not only what a student learns, but can also influence how a student learns. How a student learns has a lot to do with how a student

approaches his or her homework assignments, which should be a consideration for all teachers when preparing assignments. After all, teaching and studying are complimentary objectives.

The simple truth that teaching and studying are complimentary objectives reveals other strengths of Corbett's theory with practical advantages for both the teacher and the student.

One such strength involves an appreciation for revision. Revision is the centerpiece of the process theory of writing, which underscores the importance of invention and allowing students to use language in individual ways, thus leading them to lessons about how they see and use language, which in turn leads to better writing. One of the main advantages to the teacher who emphasizes revision is that he or she can clearly witness the student's growth as a writer. In addition, the task of evaluating a revised draft should become easier with each draft that is produced. This will lead to less time spent reading and grading papers, which means the instructor will have more time to spend either preparing lessons or to be available for those students experiencing more difficulty with assignments than other students.

With several drafts from each student before him or her by the end of the term, the task of assigning grades suddenly becomes much easier because the instructor can clearly see the changes and improvements, or the lack thereof, to previous drafts.

Another strength of Corbett's theory for the writing instructor and the student is its respect for individual experience and its ability to provide an excellent source of topics for writing. Nearly every instructor and student is familiar with the agony some students endure when it comes to choosing a topic to write about. This aspect of Corbett's theory also reminds us that so much about style depends on individual taste and discretion about what to say and how to say it to the extent that it would be difficult if not impossible to attempt writing without factoring in the individual. It makes clear the simple fact that without the individual writer there would be no style, at least according to Corbett and other theorists. Individual personality, a complex concept in its own right, also manifests itself in writing in often abstract and immeasurable ways including organizational patterns and thought processes, and even personal beliefs, prejudices, et cetera.

Yet another strength in Corbett's theory lies in the value it places in imitation exercises. Often, there is no better way to learn something than to see how others do it. When a doctor has to learn a new surgical procedure, an experienced surgeon generally first demonstrates the procedure. When an auto mechanic has to learn how to replace a different part of an automobile's suspension, he or she may have to attend a training demonstration of the process in order to become certified. Imitation in any one of its forms or variations is no less an effective tool for teachers in composition classrooms. Just as a grammar teacher presents the concept of a compound sentence and follows up with a few examples, so should a composition teacher wanting to teach style have examples of style worthy of study and imitation. Corbett's theory makes room for exactly this kind of activity because it recognizes the effectiveness that imitation represents for teachers. Imitation in the classroom can take the place of several agonizing attempts to explain style by some other means.

Instructors can use Corbett's theory as a major part of their strategy to identify and teach the concept of style to students. Corbett's theory allows instructors



plenty of opportunity to explain how word choice and individual personality, among other things, influence style and give writers control of the outcome of their writing, thereby providing both instructors and students with one of the most comprehensive and practical theories of style available to them.

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